DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 202 CE 029 410

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TITLE New Directions in the Army's Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP).
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 9p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment): Adult Basic Education: *Basic Skills: Coping: *Curriculum Development: Diagnostic Tests: Educational Diagnosis: *English (Second Language): Job Skills: Learning: Learning Activities: Military Personnel: *Military Training: Program Descriptions: *Remedial Instruction: Skill Development
IDENTIFIERS Army: Basic Skills Education Program: *Learning Strategies: *Life Coping Skills: Military Occupation Specialty

ABSTRACT

The Army has given to the Training and Doctrine Command the task of developing four Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP) curricula to provide functional, job-related basic skills training. These would be Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Baseline Skills, English-as-a-Second Language (ESL), Military Life Coping Skills, and Learning Strategies. The thrust of the MOS Baseline Skills Project is based on the concept that prerequisite to absorption of training and successful job performance are an array of functional skills and knowledge. Tasks will be to identify prerequisite competencies specifically related to individual occupational specialties, develop diagnostic tools, and provide the job-specific curricula necessary to remediate deficiences. The ESL project has three sub-projects: pre-basic training curriculum for non-native speakers, sustaining curriculum related to the soldiers' job and MOS training, and pre-enlistment package for training to a level of competency to ensure entry into and success in the Army. The Military Life Coping Skills Project is conducting four simultaneous analyses to identify problems amenable to a training solution. Analysis of learning requirements, identification of training situations, and review of materials have been completed for the Learning Strategies Project. Test projects are evaluating learning strategy models and stand-alone learning skills. (YLB)

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE ARMY'S BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAM (BSEP)

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Paper presented at the
Military Education and Training Special Interest Group
Symposium on Impact of Basic Skills Deficiencies on DOD Readiness:
Current and Alternative Training Approaches
American Educational Research Association Annual Conference
April 1981 Los Angeles, California

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Introduction

The Army historically has developed, contracted for and delivered a multitude of academic programs the aim of which have been to promote soldier on-the-job performance and general educational improvement. In recent years "BSEP", the Basic Skills Education Program, has been part of the mechanisim for meeting this primary goal. Regulatory features of the program allowed Army leaders and their Educational Service Officers relatively wide latitude in delivery of both traditional academic programs, such as those leading to high school completion, as well as providing functional training specifically directed towards improving the soldiers skills in his Military Occupational Speciality (MOS). Although the traditional academic programs have great merit in and of themselves they did not meet the need of improving soldier on-the-job performance effectively. Consequently, BSEP is being revised to provide educational programs more suited to the goals intended. The revised program will address four job related areas: Military Occupational Speciality Baseline Skills, English-as-a-Second-Language, Military Life Coping Skills, and, Learning Strategies. Development of specific job relevant curricula in these four areas will enhance BSEP effectiveness and military readiness as the traditional programs of the past have done. It will also provide work related skills to many young men and women who return to the civilian work force after voluntarily performing service to their country.

Background

Since General Washington charged his Chaplain's with teaching soldiers of the Continential Army to read and write the Army has been involved in training basic literacy skills to varying degrees. To present time, most programs have mirrored, without serious modification, traditional academic programs and practices in the private sector. Such programs were not education for educations sake but, in fact, generally reflected the concept that a better educated a soldier peformed his job more effectively. Certainly there is merit in this conclusion. However, in 1977 Congress mandated that all on-duty educational programs of the services must be specifically related to job performance. The impact of this congressional dictum caused substantial restructuring of Army's Continuing Education System (ACES). General educational programs, irrespective of merit, could not be taught on-

duty. Although, most program features were retained, on duty training essentially featured basic training in reading, mathematics and language. High school completion courses were relegated to off duty time.

In 1979, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs conducted a thorough review of the Army's Continuing Education System (ACES). It was found that the BSEP program, still very much based on traditional academic goals, was inadequate to meet the Army's need. Of the 13 recommendations steming from the review, 4 dealt directly with the requirement to develop specific, state-of-the-art adult education programs which would provide functional, job related basic skills training. The remaining recommendations addressed other aspects of ACES and modifications necessary, pending development of the job specific BSEP curriculum. The Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Army jointly approved implementation of the recommendations. These were subsequently promulgated in an action plan during January 1980.

Department of Army tasked The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to develop a functional BSEP curriculum for MOS Baseline Skills, English-as-a-second-Language, Military Life Coping Skills and Learning Strategies. The Training Developments Institute (TDI), Occupational Research and Analysis Division (ORAD) was further charged with development of the curriculum and overall project management. TRADOC Regulation 621-1 outlines the scope, responsibilities and priorities for the mission. Essentially, development was to be a contractual effort completed over a 5 year period. However, arrangements were made for the Defense Language Institute - English Language Center at Lakeland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas to be the prime developer of the language curriculum. Initial efforts in Life Coping Skills and Learning Strategies were not contracted. Resources and functional expertise in these areas was immediately available to ORAD and lessened reliance on a contracted effort. This approach further assured that the needs assessment and analysis would be as Army job relevent as possible.

Although TRADOC personnel had actively participated in development of the Department of Army action plan, work on the separate elements of the project did not commence until late January and early February of 1980. Major Robert Begland's Paper, entitled, "A Multi-Faceted Approach to Developing the Army New Basic Skills Education Program (BSEP)", will surely detail both the process and procedure which allowed a rapid transition from one phase to the other. He was intimately involved in both efforts. To detail that history here would be redundant since it suffices to say there was no descernable transition point per se. Additional project participants were added as the level of effort increased. Quite expectedly, their initiation created some turbulence. The effect was not significant and caused no real delay in executing the task.

Curriculum Development

The 4 curriculum development projects identified previously and which will be described in detail shortly are not separate entities. Although they are being described in a manner which might well lead to that conclusion they are not entirely exclusive, but must result in a single integrated and mutually supporting BSEP program. This fact, kept in mind, will help you identify the relationships between each project though they may not be stated.

The MOS Baseline Skills Project is the largest effort being undertaken; and perhaps could be called the core of the program. The thrust of the project is based on the concept that prerequisite to absorbtion of training and successful job performance are an array of functional skills and knowledges (Baseline Skills). In this respect neither presently used standardized tests nor the associated remediation programs have sufficient focus to raise the soldier to the desired of competency efficiently and effectively.

Therefore, the task at hand is to identify the prerequisite competencies specifically related to individual occupational specialities, develop diagnostic tools and provide the job specific curricula necessary to remediate deficiencies. To accomplish this a detailed analysis will be conducted of approximately one hundred highly populous military occupation specialities. Once these are identified diagnostic tests will be designed. Ultimately, a curricula will be developed to allow remediation of soldier deficiencies in the prerequisite skills and knowledges he lacks in his occupational field. Curricula packages for each MOS will not be developed but will be clustered to avoid duplication. However, tests and curricula will be designed so that individual prescriptions for remediation can be made and will be based on the specific learning requirements of the soldiers MOS. This will result in improved program efficiency and effectiveness, focus on the soldiers real needs, yet improve his overall general education.

Two projects based on the concept outlined above began recently and will last approximately 15 months. Each one has been targeted against a single MOS which consistently has shown a high attrition rate both in the academic and field environments. These two efforts are forerunners to the development of the larger project; the analysis phase for it will commence in a few months. Results of the two prototype initiatives will provide experience from which the larger project will be modified if required.

The second project, English-as-a-Second-Language, consists of three subprojects; a pre-basic training curriculum for non-native speakers

entering the first phase of Army training; a sustaining curriculum related to the soldiers job and MOS training; and, a pre-enlistment package which could be used to train prospective soldiers to a level competency which would assure entry into the Army and success through at least the first term of enlistment. The concept for development of curricula in this area is virtually the same as that of the MOS baseline skills effort - focus on the job language requirements. Appropriate grammar, survival language and cultural transition considerations are being included.

The Defense Language Institute - English Language Center initiated this project in April of 1980 and has made significant progress toward developing the Pre-Basic Training curriculum. Their analysis has been completed and they are presently in the stage of designing curriculum. It is expected that a validated curriculum will be fielded in the fall of 1981. In the area of sustaining curriculum development the job language analysis for approximately 57 MOS should be completed early this summer. However, development of the curriculum will not be completed until 1983. The last project area, pre-enlistment, will not be initiated until late this year.

To functionalize a language curriculum using a systematic approach to training development is at best difficult. It is a marked departure from the traditional methods used to design language programs. Developers are unusually plagued with the desire to design in more training than may be essential for an efficient program just to assure it will be effective. Our experience to date indicates that drawing the line leaves no feeling of assurance which is often evident in designing curricula in other subject areas. Deliberate decisions in the side of efficiency are yet to be put to the validation test - that will accure in the near future.

It was previously mentioned that the language curriculum would also address cultural transition as part of the overall development effort. This also is as difficult an arena as any in the overall project. The impact of this in non-native speakers in Basic Training has not clearly established yet. Initial analysis data conflicts markedly and requires further investigation which is presently being conducted. The difficulty in acquiring an accurate picture appears to greatly effected by a large density of highly motivated insular Puerto Ricans in the non-native speaker universe. Additionally, the structured, demanding and time controlled BT environment appears to bury all but the most severe culture shock problems. Both native and non-native speakers seems equally effected by the transition from civilian to soldier. These assertions are yet to be validated conclusively.

The third project area, Military Life Coping Skills, has proven to be the most difficult to address in terms of defining/identifying the specific

problems which are ameanable to either a training or administrative solution. Prior to assigning the task to TRADOC a select group of experts did define seven potential areas for development. These were: knowledge of the military system, coping with personal problems, coping with family problems, health education, financial affairs, dealing with others and civic responsibilities. Although the Army has a number of specific programs for related coping problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, financial counseling, a single education of program had not been considered. While it would have been simple to design a general program for each area and the associated needs, the change to provide of a functional, job relevant but efficient and effective program eliminated that option early.

An analysis project to identify those competencies which enable the soldier to deal successfully with the day to day demands associated with military life is presently being conducted. Four simultaneous initiatives have been undertaken. One effort is centered on soldier attrition, to specifically identify the root cause for the soldiers dismissal from the Army. This investigation will identify the specific coping problems and/or their cause in relation to the seven general areas originally identified. Additionally, it will indicate the severity of the problems in relation to the time which it is most likely to occure in a soldiers career. Two other efforts are similar and amount to extracting from current literature and existing coping programs the causes identified and the solutions applied. The last analysis area is targeted on a specific situation and environment, initial entry training(IET). It was concluded that most coping problems were in evidence here and that the potential of resolving them at an early stage would be much more cost effective and efficient. Since many soldiers attrit during this training period, IET provides an analysis lab to identify root problems, attrition, mastery performance and the effect of leadership. It also provides an opportunity to observe other soldiers who demonstrate coping problem symptoms but successfully complete training only to be subsequently are discharged from the service before completing their enlistment. As importantly "Mastery performance" can be identified as well. Lastly the effect of direct leadership intervention in solving soldier coping problems can be witnessed.

Completion of these four analysis efforts will produce the data necessary to make reasonable decision about initiation of curriculum development and, or, to expand the investigation into other areas. This effort is expected to be complete by September 1981. Although it is perhaps to early to draw any reasoned conclusions as the outcome, there are many indications at this stage that effective leadership at the first and second line supervisor level is perhaps the most appropriate way to resolve many problems. Immaturity, lack of responsibility and absence of sound problem solving techniques are essentially the prerequisites for generation coping problems in all seven areas.

The final project area in the BSEP curriculum development project is that of Learning Strategies. Essentially the initiative here is to assist the soldier in meeting career learning requirements by improving his ability to acquire, process and retrieve information. Learning strategy skills impact on soldier trainability and are singularly important in an environment where even the basic infantry man must employ or respond to attact by a complex range weapons systems.

Analysis of learning requirements, identification of training (learning) situations and review of materials for this project was completed by a expert workgroup in November of 1980. As a result of their recommendations, two test projects to evaluate learning strategy models has been started. These efforts will result in determining if the model can be applied in the present training environment. Additionally evaluation of stand alone learning skills such as those materials for study skills, note and test taking will be evaluated in Army Education Centers during the late spring and early summer. These efforts form the heart of addressing current learning strategy problems. A third and perhaps more significant endeavor will be initiated later this year. This will result in development of procedures to imbed learning strategies during the curriculum design process. These procedures will be used for both BSEP and MOS training program development.

SUMMARY

The four BSEP curriculum development projects being prepared and throughout the Army over the next five years will in effect provide first Army specific, job revelanent Basic Skills training program which is both efficient and effective. The MOS baseline skills curriculum will be the central core; English-as-a-Second-Language will aid non-native speakers and the Life Coping Skills and Learning Strategies endeavors will support the others as well as producing stand alone products. The impact will be significant. Volunteers from the available manpower pool can be trained and retained to improve Army readiness; soldiers leaving the Army to return to the civil sector will depart with improved capabilities as well. Perhaps, in part, these initiatives will also aid development of future basic skills programs by civilian educational institutions for young adults.

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